

My objections, please!

'saag ko kwanti' or 'mude ko mustang alloo' – A letter to President of CAN

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I foresee a group of people hungry for something else than food trying to drive Nepali gastronomy to their own garages. And now I fear, some new experts will list 'saag kokwanti' or 'mude ko mustang alloo' in Nepali food showcases. We can debate more on this agenda, as it is not about a dish, but a phenomenon. I am sure you do not want unskilled hands to play with sharp chef-knives.



Mr. Shree Ram Adhikari

President: Chefs Association of Nepal

Dear Mr. Adhikari:

This is a foodie writing to you. A person who can drive many miles or spend many hours or stay hungry for a long while to have the food he wanted. I am a Nepali food lover. I don't need a chair to finish my favorite food like choila-chieura and I have eaten in the worst places that serve the best food (oh, that 1 rupee/plate momo in lagan). I love Indian and Chinese cuisines too, but Nepali food is Nepali food to me! I love Newari, and Thakali to be even more specific. I am never ashamed to order a 'jhol-momo' anywhere. I fill my stomach with dal-bhat before 10 am (no egg-bread breakfast) and look for nice 'khaja' [momo, tarkari-chieura, choila, bara] by 2/3pm. I need sekuwa or bhutan in the

evening and still eat like a king at night, again dal-bhat. I have eaten dal-bhat even late 2am (3 hours past 11pm) or early 8am. May times I have eaten full-stomach dal-bhat even after coming from party-dinner. I am also a cook, I cook best gundruk and mutton (Nepali kaanthe-bahun style). The reason I am writing all this is to tell you that I can do anything for food, my Nepali food. To add further, I am also a hotel management graduate.

Chicken choila reminded me of a vegetarian chicken chilly (made of soya nuggets) served in Sanepa!

I am writing this letter to you in context of recent activities happening in the name of Nepali gastronomy. I recently read in media few experts (some self-claimed too) have listed 20 Nepali dishes to showcase Nepali gastronomy globally. One of the dishes there is 'chicken choila', I read. Oh my god! My objections, please! When it is choila in Nepal, it is buffalo meat- haku or maan, prepared with specific ingredients. You can make chatamari with wheat atta also, but when you say chatamari it is the one with rice-flour base. Chicken choila reminded me of a vegetarian chicken chilly (made of soya nuggets) served in Sanepa! I hope and wish this veg. chicken chilly hasn't appeared in gastronomic highlight list of any Indo-Chinese countries. And now I fear, some new experts will list 'saag ko kwanti' or 'mude ko mustang alloo' in Nepali food showcases. We can debate more on this agenda, as it is not about a dish, but a phenomenon. I am sure you do not want unskilled hands to play with sharp chef-knives.

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I have also come across a few self-acclaimed celebrity chefs who are parasitic on the name 'Nepali Gastronomy' to fulfill personal fancies of traveling foreign countries and getting a PR as an ultimate goal. Please take actions as the unpopularity we gained in foreign countries from absconding artists

and sportsmen during events, we do not want now the white long cap wearing Nepali chefs adding to it.

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I foresee a group of people hungry for something else than food trying to drive Nepali gastronomy to their own garages. It is a shame to me when I take my foreign groups to so-called stupid ethnic clean and sophistic (assuming hygienic) Nepali restaurants and they serve ‘mis-mas tarkari’ as one of Nepali signature dishes. What gastronomy signal are we passing? Once I saw some ‘whatever available thali’ being served to tourists in a restaurant in Sherpa Mall as Nepali food. No guests will criticize you on your face, but everyone feels the distinction, and many have traveled India! We had mafias in many fields in Nepal from land to water to manpower, and reverse thanks to god, now also in food ~ “welcome food mafias, your game is becoming more visible and vibrant!”

Having said this I do not mean we should not experiment with food. We should. Gastronomy should evolve. We should add as many dishes as possible with Nepali flair and flavor, but let’s not destroy the essence of original Nepali food or be an expert to recoin them for our own fancies. Food is an integral part of culture and history and let’s not play with it. Respect and preserve the old, develop the new. I would not brag about my foreign food experience but we must respect how they have preserved the typicality of their food, both ethnic and fusion.

I also request Nepal Tourism Board to please STOP funding programs that are made with an objective of just meeting NTB’s budget headings

One of the persons who always inspires me is Dr. Ramesh Dhungel. This brutally frank fearless expert roars loud in media and meetings whenever anyone incompetent talks history as a 'talk'. I wish we had someone as competent to roar for Nepali gastronomy. This letter is a call for that someone through you. Mr. Adhikari, I request your quick strong attention in these activities. I also request Nepal Tourism Board to please STOP funding programs that are made with an objective of just meeting NTB's budget headings in line with their immature competencies. Funding a crook, you are destroying an important hard-earned asset and thus equally responsible for the damage.

Besides welfare of chefs and culinary training, where you are doing really well, your focus should now be on Nepali gastronomy. You have authority, you just need to have courage, gather genuine experts and specialists and set some standards and benchmarks. Also, warn food mafias to not sell Nepali gastronomy to their profits and glory.

Why don't we aim for a Nepali food-museum?

Mr. Adhikari, at last, I have a dream as a suggestion to you. Why don't we aim for a Nepali food-museum? This food museum, as I dream, will be a showcase of our ethnic Nepali food and utensils and cooking methods and ingredients. This museum will be operated by various communities in their own ethnic spirits (like Lahana in Kirtipur). Many Nepali, tourists, and food experts and scholars and historians will visit this place. We can request NTB, HAN, NATA, RABAN, PATA, etc to partner. I am sure, the line ministry will give you a place in the lease to operate this. Just imagine, we can have a mini-Nepal there. While traveling East-West of Nepal at a single stretch, I had luckily experienced the glorious food and hospitality diversity of our country on a go. The same tarkari of aloo in Ilam, Birgunj, Narayanghat, Butwal, Nepalgunj, and Dadeldhura has so many distinctions. Nepali food museum can be one of the good avenue and reason to unite different casts and religions of Nepal. I am sure many food enthusiasts like me will be with you on this drive. I have also made a concept note for it, available if it helps you.

“You start, someone else will finish it, and another one will operate. If you want to do all three, you will start very small.”

I know it is a big and complicated project. But I keep telling starters as a starter person myself- “You start, someone else will finish it, and another one will operate. If you want to do all three, you will start very small.” So, let's make a humble start. It will be a hallmark initiative of Chefs Association of Nepal.

I have read many saints and pundits telling us not to crave for any kind of food as food is to only cater to body energy and nutrition needs. But I am ready to go to hell later if my craving for food of my mood is going to take me there. And no matter in my whatever imperfect words, I will keep talking about my Nepali food.

May goddess 'Annapurna' always give you extra power to preserve Nepali gastronomy!

Suvadina, Sanat Neupane

CC:

Board Members, Chefs Association of Nepal

Nepal Tourism Board

Sanat Neupane

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